

Second, I cannot imagine that my friends on the Republican side, particularly in the Republican leadership—my friend the majority leader, who I have great respect for, and Speaker RYAN—would be complicit in creating a constitutional crisis. They must work with us and not open the door to a constitutional crisis during the August recess.

SANCTIONS BILL

Mr. President, on one last item, I know there is a lot going on today, but I just want to mention one item from the House of Representatives. Later, the House is going to take up and, hopefully, pass with near unanimity a sanctions bill that includes strong sanctions against Russia, Iran, and North Korea. It is critical that the Senate act promptly on this legislation.

I will work with the majority leader, as I have in recent weeks, to ensure its swift passage so we can get it to the President's desk before we leave for recess.

Thank you, Mr. President.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Nebraska.

Mrs. FISCHER. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mrs. FISCHER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. KENNEDY). Without objection, it is so ordered.

RECESS

Mrs. FISCHER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate recess until 2:15 p.m. today for the weekly conference meetings.

There being no objection, the Senate, at 12:32 p.m., recessed until 2:15 p.m. and reassembled when called to order by the Presiding Officer (Mr. PORTMAN).

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT FOR FISCAL YEAR 2018—MOTION TO PROCEED—Continued

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Democratic leader be recognized for 5 minutes for debate only and that I then be recognized for 5 minutes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

The Democratic leader.

HEALTHCARE

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, in a short time, we will vote on the motion to proceed to debate the House Republican healthcare bill. Several months

into this new process, with Republicans in the majority in both Chambers, the American people have not been treated to a high-minded debate or to much debate at all.

The very first action of this Congress was for the majority to pass reconciliation instructions on healthcare—a process which has locked out Democrats from the very beginning. The very first thing this Republican Congress said to the American people is that healthcare is going to be a partisan project, undertaken by Republicans and Republicans alone. Right out of the gate, Democrats were locked out. The majority leader elected to forge a bill in secret and bypass the committee process entirely—no public hearings, no open debate, no opportunity for the minority to amend the bill or even to read it before it emerged from the leader's office. Their plan all along was to keep their bill hidden for as long as possible, evade scrutiny, hide the truth from the American people, and then jam the bill through in the dead of night on a party line.

Now, here we are, after so much cloak-and-dagger legislating, about to vote on proceeding to a debate on one of the most important issues of our time—one-sixth of the economy and tens of millions' health and even lives affected without knowing exactly what we will be debating on. Perhaps nothing could sum up the process that has gotten us here quite as well as this. The best the majority leader has been able to cook up is a vague plan to do whatever it takes to pass something—anything—to get the bill to a House and Senate conference on healthcare.

My colleagues, plain and simple, it is a ruse. The likeliest result of a conference between the House and Senate is the full repeal of the Affordable Care Act or something very close to it. It will, certainly, mean drastic cuts in Medicaid, huge tax cuts for the wealthy, no help for those with pre-existing conditions, and tens of millions losing healthcare, particularly in poorer and more rural States.

The hard-right Freedom Caucus in the House would never accept a Republican bill that only repeals a few regulations in the ACA but leaves much in place.

I would say to my colleagues, particularly those on the other side of the aisle who have heartfully fought hard for not cutting Medicaid drastically, for keeping preexisting conditions, for not giving tax cuts to the rich while you are cutting healthcare for the poor, do not go along with this motion to proceed, because you know and I know what it will lead to. All of the things that you have been trying to avoid will emerge from that conference, and you will hurt the people of your States dramatically.

We all know what is happening here. The leader could not get the votes on a full repeal because it is so damaging to America. He could not get the votes even on his own bill. Instead, the plan

is to come up with a proposal that is simply a means to repeal, a means to dramatic cuts, a means to getting us in conference, and we all know what the result of that conference will be.

I would plead one last time with my friends on the other side of the aisle—and I know you have sincerely tried to modify and change things—to turn back. We can go through regular order. We want to work with you. We know that the ACA is not perfect, but we also know that what you have proposed is much worse. We can work together to improve healthcare in this country. Turn back now before it is too late and millions and millions and millions of Americans are hurt so badly in ways from which they will never, ever recover.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, 7 years ago, Democrats imposed ObamaCare on our country. They said that costs would go down. Costs skyrocketed. They said that choice would go up. Choice plummeted. Now ObamaCare's years-long lurch toward total collapse is nearing a seemingly inevitable conclusion, and it will hurt even more Americans on the way down.

This, my friends, is the ObamaCare status quo. This is the status quo. We have had to accept it for a long time. We do not have to accept it any longer.

The American people elected a House with a vision of a better way on healthcare. Then they elected a Senate. Then they elected a President. Now, having been given the responsibility to govern, we have a duty to act. The President is ready with his pen. The House has passed legislation. Today, it is the Senate's turn. That starts with a vote that we will take momentarily. The critical first step in that process is the motion to proceed. It is the vote that determines whether this debate can proceed at all, whether we will even take it up after four straight elections in which this was a huge commitment to the American people. It is the vote that determines whether the Senators of both parties can offer their amendments and ideas on healthcare.

I told the people of my State, over this period, that I would vote to move beyond ObamaCare, and that is what I am going to do today by voting yes. I ask all of my colleagues to join me in doing so. We have already shown that it is possible to put legislation on the President's desk that moves us beyond ObamaCare and its years of failure. We did that 2 years ago. President Obama vetoed what we passed before. President Trump will sign what Congress passes this time.

I thank the President and the administration for all they have done on this issue already. They have worked with us every step of the way, and they, like us, know the consequences of failing to act.

Look, we cannot let this moment slip by. We cannot let it slip by. We have